# Essential Student Skills: Finding learning resources

## Introduction

In this section we are going to discover what learning resources are available to you across UHI. You will be given an opportunity to practise finding and accessing the resources you need and you will also learn something about how to use them effectively.


*Man & magnifying glass - Shutterstock*

## Objectives

By the time you have completed this section you should be able to:

- Recognise the importance of studying beyond the core materials
- Search for and access a range of resources
- Search for topics within journals and access appropriate papers
- Select credible sources of information

## The importance of reading

In many courses the learning materials you find in your week-by-week module content (usually in the VLE) form the milestones on the 'road map' to learning. However, it is up to you to follow the planned route to ensure you learn the subject by completing the suggested tasks and recommended reading. The higher the level you are studying at the more 'reading round' a subject you will need to do.


*Pixabay*

At Level 7 (HNC or first year degree) your tutor will often provide you with most of the titles and websites you need to look at but will sometimes ask you to research specific topics or areas. At Level 9 (third year degree) you will also be given a reading list, but you will be expected to 'read around' your subject much more; i.e. find other sources, research your own and other people's ideas in depth. At higher levels it is necessary for a successful student to engage with the course content, undertake additional reading and engage critically with the subject.

Your lecturers/tutors will provide you with information and they will encourage you to examine that information critically but much of your ability to do this will depend on how much you have read about different perspectives on the subject – and you have access to a considerable range of reading through UHI.

## Reading lists

Course, module or unit leaders will often supply you with reading lists divided into either 'core' (or 'essential') or 'recommended' texts. To do this, via Brightspace, they will use UHI library software Talis Aspire. As well as gathering all your readings together into one place, additional benefits of Talis Aspire include:
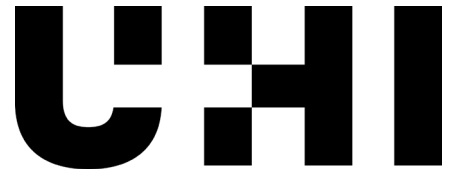
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- You have the ability to search for your lists by title or module code
- You have access to both Core and Recommended reading
- You can access electronic resources, ebooks, ejournals and articles, for your course directly from the list
- Talis offers a single site for accessing all module reading lists, meaning no more Word documents/PDFs with broken links and inaccurate details.
- You can filter and search longer lists
- New! Note taking, reading intentions and saving lists for easy access
- There are options for printing, sharing and exporting your list
- Talis is designed to work on all sizes of device.
- Talis features a feedback button which goes directly to the library/LIS department.

(from UHI Library Resource Lists page)

## Core Texts
It is highly recommended that you buy core texts. Core texts will be frequently referred to during the course.

You will probably need to read sections or chapters of core texts in preparation for classes.

Core texts will be available from your college library but in high demand from other students. If you are studying at a distance you may be unable to get in to visit the library often, if at all, so it is much easier to have your own copy to hand.

## Recommended Texts
You are not expected to buy recommended texts.

Recommended texts are useful when you are reading around the subject and preparing for assessments.

You will probably not need to read recommended texts in preparation for classes. Where short sections or chapters of recommended texts are used in class, often tutors will be able to supply a photocopy/scan.

Your college library may not hold all recommended texts but you are able to request texts held at libraries in other UHI Academic Partners.

## Reading lists
This link shows an example of a module reading list and while there are other styles, most will be similar.

Watch the following video from UHI Libraries: 'Introduction to reading lists'
*Note: if you see a login prompt, enter your UHI username and password.

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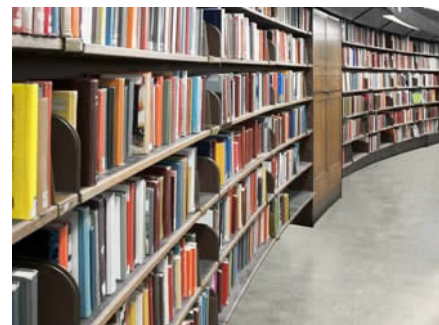Audio: Reading lists

*"I think my biggest thing with the books would be even before you start, if you are looking at reading lists you're sent and things like that, you definitely don't need to try and buy everything on the reading list. The journal access particularly through the UHI Library is fantastic. I mean, thousands of journals on all kinds of subjects and then the courses are quite well put together from that. Virtually everything that you might need, you can get access to electronically, things 15, 16, 1700s, they've been able to give us links to electronic copies of everything – it's been very good like that. The excuse of 'well I couldn't get access to that' doesn't really work any more. When I was an undergrad you could try that!"*

## UHI libraries

UHI libraries are both physical and virtual spaces. They are made up of all of the physical resources available in the colleges and learning centres, and all of the electronic resources, like e-books and e-journals. Everything in UHI libraries is listed in the UHI library catalogue which is held electronically and is searchable. You can search the library catalogue in a number of ways:



*Interior of a library with book shelves - Shutterstock*

- **By keyword** to find resources related to a particular topic e.g. global warming,
- **By subject** to find resources in a particular area of study e.g. geology
- **By location** to find resources near to you
- **By resource type** to find electronic resources only

The activities in rest of this section will help you to develop the skills you will need in order to find resources for studying. It is **better that you learn to do this now**, rather than under pressure when you need them for study and assessment so please take the time to complete them.

## Using the UHI Libraries

You can find information about using the library through the LibGuides portal. This portal contains 45 separate guides, some of which are directed at staff but many are of direct relevance to you. The guides are categorised by type. Even a brief look will show you the amazing breadth of resources available to you through UHI Libraries.

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## Video guides

The library has also created a number of short videos covering aspects of the library service, introducing various systems and resources that will be useful for your study and research: Video guides.

Audio: Making full use of the UHI library

> "A lot of the stuff we are given to read, we can access online, but I do make full use of the college library in Elgin. I tend to buy all my core texts and then any additional reading, then if I can get them out of the college library then I will so I don't have to buy them but I have access to them if I need them, but the majority of texts for lectures and any additional reading, we can access online"

# Accessing books

Each UHI college library holds stocks of books on a wide variety of subjects but all students are also able to use the **inter-site loan system** to access books from any UHI library, not just their enrolling college library.

## SCONUL

All UHI students are eligible for **SCONUL** (The Society of College, National and University Libraries) membership which grants you access to the libraries of Universities and Colleges across the UK. Further information can be found on the SCONUL website.

*Book stack isolated on white background - Shutterstock*

## Placing a hold on a book

To request a print book, use the 'Place Hold' feature (picture below, click to enlarge) in Library Search. You will be asked to choose a relevant pickup location or can request postal loan instead. You will receive an email from the system when your book is ready to collect. All library notifications are sent to your UHI email account.

*Placing a hold*

## Accessing e-books

E-books are electronic versions of printed texts and UHI students are able to access any e-books (or e-journals) in the UHI library no matter where they are studying. These resources are held in different virtual library spaces on the internet.

You can search for e-books (and e-journals) by using the drop down menu on the library catalogue to limit your search results to electronic resources only. You can click through from the search results to the e-book itself. You will normally be prompted to enter your UHI user name and password so that only current students can access the e-books.
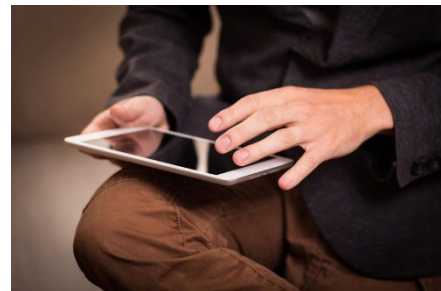
*Pixabay*

If you find you are unable to access e-books or e-journals this may be a technical issue and you should log a call with Servicedesk via the Unidesk portal.

### Finding an e-book

Details of how to access e-books (*you have access to over 50,000 of them!) can be found on the website.

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# Accessing e-journals

E-journals are electronic versions of printed journals (also known as periodicals). These are specialist publications that contain a number of articles by different authors. UHI provides access to several thousand journals online so you have plenty of opportunity to read the very latest information and research. Many journals are **peer-reviewed**; so a panel of experts review each article to decide whether or not to publish it. This means that journal articles are generally trustworthy and of a high quality. Journal articles will be a key source of information throughout your university studies.

*Pexels*

Access to so many journals has its downside because you can find it difficult to find what you need. With uncertain search techniques, it is not uncommon to find tens of thousands of results. It is important that you learn how to search effectively and manage large amounts of results. The following activities give you the opportunity to begin learning – but practice will make you better at it.

## Accessing e-journal articles using a database

Details of how to access e-journal articles can be found on the UHI Libraries website.

# Using Library Search

*Library Search* is way of searching the combined library resources. It provides a 'Google-like' way of searching many sources at the same time, in both the physical and digital parts of the library.

With just one search box you can discover material from all the following sources provided by the University:
- UHI Library catalogue – Print books, journals, AV materials
- Newspaper articles – from all the collections subscribed to
- E-journal articles – from all the collections subscribed to
- E-books – all the UHI collections
- Conference proceedings

## Library Search

Question:  Why use Library Search instead of Google?

Answer: A search on Google will return many articles which are out with our subscriptions – some of these may be available to you, but many will not. Library Search restricts itself to the materials for which the University has subscriptions or other access. The refinements that you make to your search can also add a quality filter, ensuring that you are using authentic academic resources.

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## Library Search video guide
Here is a short video guide on using [Library Search](#).

## Library Search features
- The results will be listed in order of relevance – taking you straight to the most useful material.
- You can use the side bar to refine your search by publication date, content type, location, language, subject terms and so on.
- When you find anything that interests you, just click on the link. If the material is online, you will be asked for your UHI login then taken to the article or E-book in question. If the item is a book, the full catalogue details will appear.
- You can also use the Advanced Search option to make your search very specific – by combining author, title, date etc. This is especially useful when using very common search terms.

## Accessing Library Search



*Library Search section on the library pages*

You'll find Library Search on the [libraries page](#) of the UHI Website.

If you need help getting the most out of Library Search, contact your Academic Partner library staff.

# Evaluating resources

You will soon become adept at using a number of different tools to search for resources; the UHI library catalogue, databases, the internet. To use these tools effectively it is necessary to become an intelligent searcher so that your searches return relevant results, and that you do not waste time reading materials that are of no use to you.



*A laptop with a magnifying glass searching the internet*

## Search tips sheet

The tips below will help you to develop sophisticated search techniques. Download and save it to your computer so you can refer to it when you start to look for resources to help your studies.

**Tips and tricks for online searching**
**General tips**
- Think carefully about your keywords – individual, specific concepts work better than complicated phrases e.g. 'maternal deprivation' AND 'crime', rather than 'Are children deprived of maternal care more likely to end up committing crimes'.
- Put inverted commas around a phrase to keep it together e.g. "climate change".
- Check that spellings are correct, or try American spelling or terms if you are not getting many hits, e.g. teens instead of teenager
- Use the asterisk* to indicate lots of words with the same root – child* will get you child, children, childhood, childlike, etc.

**Tips for when using databases**
- Change the main search field to **Title** to return results only where your search terms appear in the title
- Restrict the search to **Full Text** so you don't waste time looking for articles only to find that you don't have access to them.
- Restrict the search to **Scholarly Journals** to ensure you return high quality resources
- Restrict the date range to the last five or ten years to access the most up to date research
- Lots of the databases let you set up a folder or account in which you can store the results of searches as you go along.

## Google search tips

This [Google search cheat sheet](#) will also give you some tips on advanced searching

# Which resources?

With the wealth of resources available it can sometimes be difficult to know where to start. As different types of resource have features that make them appropriate for different tasks, it is often useful to think about what task you are completing and then selecting the appropriate resource type for that task as a starting point.

### *Book*
**Definition**: Extended piece of writing about a specific topic
**Positive features**: Go into detail about a specific topic
**Negative features**: Time consuming to read. Represent the views of only one person.
**Good for...**: ...reading one or two chapters in order to find detailed information when preparing for essays or assignments

### *Textbook*
**Definition**: A book written specifically for students of the subject
**Positive features**: Cover the fundamental aspects of a subject
**Negative features**: Can be lacking in detail. Can get out of date
**Good for**: ...getting a broad overview

### *Journal*
**Definition**: A publication containing short scholarly articles which are published at regular times during the year
**Positive features**: Up to date as published regularly. Trustworthy contents as journal articles are often peer-reviewed
**Negative features**: Can be quite specific in their focus
**Good for**: ...current in-depth research on a particular topic

### *Website*
**Definition**: A set of related pages on the Worldwide Web containing information e.g. about a person, topic or organisation
**Positive features**: Updated regularly, easy to access
**Negative features**: Can be inaccurate and untrustworthy
**Good for**: ...gathering information quickly

### *Newspaper*
**Definition**: A daily publication consisting of articles by different authors
**Positive features**: Updated daily
**Negative features**: Can be lacking in detail, can be biased, get out of date quickly
**Good for**: ...gathering information quickly, getting the 'public view' of a topic

## Using reliable resources

Whatever resources you are using you should be a ***critical reader***; this involves questioning what you read rather than taking it at face value. With each resource you look at you need to ask yourself:

- **When was it written?** If it is old then any factual information it contains could be out of date.
- **Who was it written by?** Is it written by an impartial observer, or someone who may have a biased viewpoint?
- **Why was it written?** Is it written as a factual account (are all the facts correct? What evidence is presented for these?), a comment piece (so may express the author's individual point of view), a press release or advertising campaign (so may be trying to sell the reader something).
- **What evidence is given for the facts or views presented?** Does the writer back up any claims they make with evidence; such as by referring to research or news articles about the topic?


*Pixabay*

## Using the internet

When you write academically you are required to draw evidence from a range of different sources to show you have read beyond the reading list. Books are an obvious source of information but electronic resources and the World Wide Web provide you with ready access to so much more – and you are encouraged to use these to extend your learning.
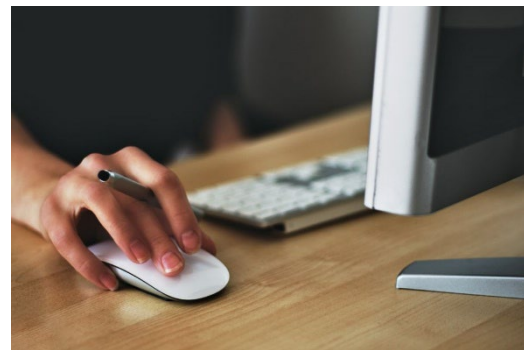

*Pexels*

The internet gives you access to an enormous amount of information. As well as the websites of individuals, companies and organisations, you can use it to access newspapers, online journals and e-books. One of the challenges in studying at this level is your management of time.  You need to access but also read and reflect on the material; there is no value from simply downloading a lot of resources, however useful and relevant they look, unless of course you plan to read and review them.

### Using search engines

Using search engines like Yahoo, Google and Bing can help you to find relevant information from the internet. Because the range of resources is so considerable you need to be focussed in your searching, that means trying to define your search parameters as narrowly as possible before starting.

For example:
- Searching for 'bank' in Google gives you 11,870,000,000 results
- Searching for 'Lloyds bank' gives you 37,700,000 million results
- Searching for 'Lloyds bank collapse' gives you 494,000 results

Thinking about your search strings before you actually begin searching is generally time well spent.

In addition, you should set aside a fixed amount of time to search. It is very easy to get carried away and continue looking for that elusive website or article that will answer all your questions!

There are many sites with guidance on effective internet searching. One such guide is [How to plan your search strategy and pick your search engine?](#) from Girton College Cambridge. Have a look. Some of the most useful information is around how to **refine** your search and how to **evaluative** the results.

## Using trustworthy websites

The problem with the web is that it contains a great deal of information that is not based on sound academic evidence – and the challenge for you is to decide what is good information and what is not. The following might help:
- Any government site is a useful source of policy information and much of this has a reference list at the end showing the sources from which information/ data has been drawn. The UK government web address (or URL) ends with .gov.uk. You must, however, be aware that policy documents have a bias associated with whichever party is in power when it is produced – so always look for the alternative argument too.
- Any URL ending with .ac is an academic site and the information within it should be sound and credible. .ac.uk is a British academic organisation, ac.au is Australian, .edu is American, etc.
- .org.uk tells you that the site is a recognised British organisation, usually a charity. Information from these sources may be used with care but be aware that charities have their own agenda so content may have some bias.
- .co.uk shows a UK business. Take care with these sources because they are usually selling something (even if it appears they aren't) and it is in their interests to convince readers of the importance or value of their product.
- .com could be anything. These sites often appear to be offering sound information; they certainly present 'evidence' but they rarely offer dated papers and they often do not base information on research. They also have an agenda of their own. It is wise to avoid these sites as sources of evidence.
- The best evidence is peer-reviewed and all good quality academic journals fall into this category. Please be aware that **Wikipedia is not strictly peer-reviewed (although it is moderated)**. As such, it is **not** an accepted source for academic writing (although it is quite good to find explanations of words/

terms you don't understand and can be a good starting point for further investigation).

## Conclusion

This session has guided through the various ways in which you can access good quality reading materials for study, and you have been given an explanation of what is meant by 'good quality'. The importance of wider reading has been emphasised and you have been given simple step by step instructions to access the resources you need.
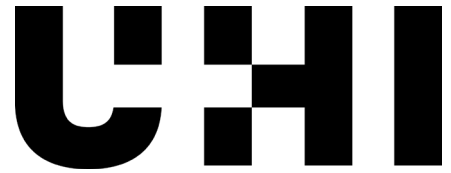


*Pexels*

1. You should buy your own copy of any texts marked as 'core' on your reading list:

   ○ True ○ False

2. You can only borrow books from your local college library:

   ○ True ○ False

3. You can only access e-books and e-journals on university computers:

   ○ True ○ False

4. The Library Search tool allows you to search all UHI library materials, not just books: ○ True ○ False

5. You should only read books (not any other type of resource) when you are studying for an assessment:

   ○ True ○ False

6. You shouldn't use websites in your academic work as they are unreliable:

   ○ True ○ False

Answers
1. True. You will probably need to refer to your core text for every class so buy a copy if you can. Second-hand copies can be an inexpensive option but check the year of publication so that you buy the correct edition.
2. False. The inter-site loan system allows you to borrow texts from other UHI libraries, as long as they are not out on loan.
3. False. You can access electronic content from any computer with access to the internet providing you have a valid UHI username and password.
4. True. Library Search is a way of searching through all of the content that you have access to as a UHI student, including books, journal articles and newspapers.
5. False. You should draw on the most appropriate resources to complete assessments. These will usually include books and journal articles as these tend to be scholarly and peer reviewed, but could include newspapers, websites, radio and TV programmes.

6. False. It is fine to use websites as sources for academic work but you should take care to only use those which are reliable or trustworthy (for example, those of government organisations and universities).